

How does man explain the universe and himself if he only has himself to start with? Seems a simple question doesn't it? The answers that man produces for that "simple question" have destroyed millions of lives, caused untold destruction of property and brought modern man to a point of utter despair. The story of modern man can be explained in many ways by looking at how he has tried to answer that question. The sad part of this story is that man has had the right answer for thousands of years and has always cast it aside for another lie. It is the pursuing of these lies that has brought us to where we are today. The question today is "where do we go from here?" However, I am getting ahead of myself. Let us look how man has tried to explain the universe and himself during the "Age of Non-Reason."

Non-Christian philosophers, beginning primarily in the Renaissance, have tried to understand the unity and knowledge of reality by starting from man alone. The older philosophic views anticipated that man, by reason alone, would be able to come to an established and unified "true knowledge of what reality is, and that when this happened they would have satisfying explanations for everything encountered in the universe and for all that people are and think." This search for "truth" has become modern man's Tower of Babel.

The great thinkers, the philosophers of the day developed theories and "systems of thought" that provided some satisfactory answers about the universe and man. Each system of thought had its moment of fame. Some were longer than others but, like the western gunfighters, after a while, a newer, faster gunfighter came along.

These developed systems of thought were supposed to provide man with a satisfactory explanation for all existence, including man and what he thinks. Over time, each system of thought built upon the previous one until a point was reached when it all came tumbling down. "After all the centuries . . . the humanistic expectation of autonomous man's providing a unity to all of knowledge and all of life had stalled." Modern philosophy no longer sought the perfect system and the optimistic hope was lost. In the 18th century the optimism of humanism was replaced with pessimism because the humanistic ideal had failed. The great thinkers "could not get there from here." There were pessimism and despair because man could not to explain the reality of the world and his existence by just starting from himself. The exact time of this realization and beginning of despair is debatable but for Francis Schaeffer it began with the French thinker Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778).

Rousseau saw primitive man, what he came to call "the noble savage," as superior to civilized man. Rousseau wrote, "If man is good by nature, as I believe to have shown him to be, it follows that he stays like that as long as nothing foreign to him corrupts him." Rousseau believed that even amid the Enlightenment, "with its emphasis on reason and the arts and sciences," that man had lost more than he gained. He reached a point where he felt that the problem of man was civilization. The noble savage was man at his best and the more he came under the influence of civilization the worse he became. "So he gave up his faith in 'progress.'"

The next step for Rousseau and his followers from the idea of the noble savage and the negative influence of civilization was that as the noble savage man was born free but with the “the restraints of civilization as evils: ‘Man was born free, but everywhere he is in chains!’” Rousseau believed that primitive man was innocent and good and that freedom from any external control or constraint was the final good. “We must understand that the freedom he advocated was not just freedom from God or the Bible but freedom from any kind of restraint -- freedom from culture, freedom from any authority, an absolute freedom of the individual -- a freedom in which the individual is the center of the universe.”

The noble savage is the personification of good and to develop and keep that “good,” primitive man must be completely free from all restraints. Yet even Rousseau could not hold the line here. As one might expect there was an exception, and what an exception. “Rousseau’s concept of autonomous freedom clashed with his own presentation when he moved from the individual to society. In the *Social Contract* (1762) he writes, ‘In order that the social compact may not be an empty formula, it tacitly includes the undertaking, which alone can give force to the rest, that whoever refuses to obey the general will shall be compelled to do so by the whole body.’” Rousseau is saying that the state, in that it always has the best interests of its citizens at heart, the state can legitimately use force to make man free. “Once more humanistic utopianism ends in tyranny . . .”

Rousseau’s concept of primitive man as born good, and the idea that the state can use force to make sure that what the state determines to be good is accomplished, have come down through history leaving a bloody wake in its path. These have become the foundation blocks of modern humanism. “Rousseau had a profound effect on the thoughts and the lives of those who followed him. His thinking continues to influence that of our own day in many ways.” The power of Rousseau on education, music, theater, literature, cultures, and societies has been immense.

Rousseau’s thought can be traced to Bohemianism, the genesis of the hippie movement of the 1960s. Germans Goethe, von Schiller, and Lessing were all influenced by Rousseau, and they gave birth to the romantic movement in Germany. “All three of these men were at first followers of the Enlightenment before they turned aside to follow Rousseau. Reason was the hero of the Enlightenment; emotion became the hero of romanticism.” English poets’ William Wordsworth and Samuel Coleridge wrote in the same romantic vein.

Rousseau’s thinking even influenced music. Beethoven (1770-1827) expressed Rousseau’s thinking in his music. Schaeffer observes: “Beethoven’s music, more than that of any composer before him, gives the impression of being a direct outpouring of his personality. In it we already feel the emphasis of modern man on self-expression.” Schaeffer credits Beethoven and his last quartets, written between 1825 and 1826, as the forerunner “to twentieth-century music.”

Perhaps you recall the confirmation hearings of Supreme Court Justice Clarence

Thomas and aside from the issues surrounding Ms. Anita Hill, and we heard about the subject of natural law. Did you wonder what is natural law? It was the attempt by advocates of Rousseau to make nature the basis of morals that brought about the “Natural Law School of jurisprudence.” As we have seen in the Thomas’ confirmation hearings, its effect continues to influence jurisprudence in our courts today. “It was an attempt in this eighteenth-century period to have principles of law, ‘even if there is no God.’ These jurists thought that a complete and perfect system of law could be constructed upon principles of natural law.” One of the problems that the “naturalists” had was that Nature makes no distinction between certain things such as cruelty and non-cruelty, Nature is both.

What is the problem of taking nature as the moral standard? To answer this question Schaeffer asks us to consider the Marquis de Sade (1740-1814), “who well understood the logical conclusion of this deification of nature. He knew that if nature is all, then what is right, and nothing more can be said. The natural result of this was his ‘sadism,’ his cruelty, especially to women.” de Sade writing in his book “Justine” says “As nature has made us (the men) the strongest, we can do with her (the woman) whatever we please.” In nature there is no right or wrong, no good or bad, and there is no basis for making those distinctions. In nature, might makes right. Can you imagine what true natural system of law would look like? Schaeffer’s conclusion is; “There are no moral distinctions, no value system. What is right? Thus, there is no basis for either morals or law.” If we are to make nature the rule, the yardstick by which we live then there is no distinction between things like cruelty and noncruelty.

Philosophically, the dilemma facing man was how can one hold the belief of the freedom of the noble savage and at the same time be an advocate of the beliefs that man without an absolute power outside of himself (God) is a machine.

“It became clear that those who held the rationalistic position on the sole basis of their own reason increasingly were forced to conclude that everything, including man, is a machine.” The impossible tension between “autonomous freedom” and “autonomous reason” yielded the synthesis that the universe and people are just a part of the total “cosmic machine.” The philosophers’ Kant, Hegel, and Kierkegaard and their followers sought to bring about a unity of thought between these two positions but they did not solve the problem. What their failure did do was to bring us to the modern point of view that hope is lost.

The writings of Kant, Hegel, and Kierkegaard, with those of Rousseau, caused people to give up the hope of the “old non-Christian philosophers” that “people starting from themselves could by their reason find a unified answer to everything.” For example, the German, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) developed a system that put “great emphasis on the centrality of the state and the flow of history.” It is an oversimplifying of Hegel’s position but what most people take away from Hegel is that “truth is to be sought in synthesis rather than the antithesis. Instead of the antithesis (that some things are true and their opposite untrue), truth and moral rightness will be found in the flow of history, a synthesis of them.” This means we no longer see truth as absolutes but as Schaeffer suggests “our generation sees solutions in his writings

synthesis. . . . When this happens, truth, as people had always thought of truth, has died.”

It was left to Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), a Dane to help us make a “leap of faith.” Kierkegaard believed that reason can only lead to pessimism. If one is to seek “optimistic answers in regard to meaning and values” he can only do so by looking outside of reason, “on an upper level.” It is only by a “leap of faith” that man can find meaning without reason. “Through a ‘leap of faith’ one must try to find meaning without reason. So optimism will now always be in nonreason.”

The mark of modern man is the total separation “between the area of meaning and values, and the area of reason. Reason, leading to despair, must be kept separate from the blind optimism of nonreason.” This creates “a lower and an upper story, with the lower story of reason leading to pessimism and men trying to find optimism in an upper story devoid of reason.” .

Modern man’s search for “optimism in an upper story devoid of reason” has led him down some strange paths. French Existentialism with its attempt to separate reason and will as, to make sense of man’s existence without reason, turned to living in the upper story. Modern man desperate to find meaning in his life turned to nonreason and filled the upper story. Some people turned to Existentialism, others have turned to drugs, and others to Eastern religions, some the occult and for some they have tried them all. Let’s briefly look at what some people have put in the “upper Story.”

Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) is probably the best-known existentialist. “He held that in the area of reason everything is absurd, but nonetheless a person can authenticate himself by an act of the will; everyone should abandon the pose of spectator and act in a purposeless world.” The term "existentialism" is a term that was a self-description adopted by Jean-Paul Sartre, and came to be identified with a cultural movement that flourished in Europe in the 1940s and 1950s. “And by the mid 1970s the cultural image of existentialism had become a cliché, parodied in countless books and films by Woody Allen.”

Existentialism evolved as less of a philosophy and more of a name given to a distinct vein of philosophical inquiry in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Existentialism has had an important affect upon the field of theology not because of a concern with the question of existence in general but because of its claim that thinking about human existence requires new categories. The existing categories of ancient or modern thought were not sufficient as “human beings can be understood neither as substances with fixed properties, nor as atomic subjects primarily interacting with a world of objects.” "Existentialism" is the philosophical theory which holds that a further set of categories, governed by the norm of authenticity, is necessary to grasp human existence.

For French existentialists, Sartre and Albert Camus (1913-1960), there was a total separation between reason and will. Reason was absurd and man could only “authenticate” himself by an act of will. With reason understood as separated from the will by Sartre and Camus, it followed that will could act in any direction with equal validity. Reason was not part of the equation and therefore there was nothing that could show you which “direction your will should take.” Like many before them, both Sartre and Camus found that it was not possible for them to live consistently with their position.

Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), was a German philosopher, who some feel exerted a great influence on Sartre’s thinking. Heidegger believed that “answers are separated from reason.” It a young Heidegger who first “introduced the term angst (roughly meaning ‘anxiety’) as a word defining modern man’s stance before the world.” Angst, for Heidegger, was the “general feeling of anxiety one experiences in the universe. It is fear without a definite object.”

Another German philosopher who was also an existentialist was Karl Jaspers (1883-1969). It was Jaspers who introduced the idea that we may have “a final ‘experience’ in life.” The final experience was a term Jaspers used to explain the idea that “even though our mind tells us life is absurd, we may have some huge experience that encourages us to believe that there is a meaning to life.” Understanding can only be gained in nonreason. If reason only leads to pessimism then man must find an answer in nonreason.

In Humanism man attempts to make himself the center of the universe. Starting from himself man tries to become self-sufficient and by starting from himself and individual details, or particulars, man hopes to build his own universals. Man tried and failed! In his failure man can only acknowledge that he, like everything else in the universe, is just a machine. That answer leaves man a pessimist without hope. If pessimism is the best reason can do then what about nonreason?

The next foray into the nonreason was led by the humanist, English writer, Aldous Huxley (1894-1963). His answer to the problem was drugs. He believed that we should “give healthy people drugs and they can then find truth inside their own heads. They can then have the final experience any time they wish; they do not need to wait, hoping that something will happen.” Huxley first expressed this theory in his best known fictional work “Brave New World,” written in 1932. In Eastern Hindu myths the gods were kept contented by taking a drug called “soma.” By using this name for drugs, in his writings, Huxley was “tying into Eastern thought his hope of finding a meaning for life in the area of nonreason.”

Huxley went to his grave openly advocating the use of drugs as the way have the “final’ or first-order” experience. “He made his wife promise to give him LSD when he was ready to die so that he would die in the midst of a trip.” For Huxley and his followers, the

conclusion was that “truth” was inside a person’s head. With this thought “the ideal objective of truth was gone – there was only the subjective truth that existed inside one’s own head.”

Together with the advent of the “drug Age” was the increased interest in the West in the religious experience of Hinduism and Buddhism. Schaeffer tells us that: “This grasping for a nonrational meaning to life and values is the central reason that these Eastern religions are so popular in the West today.” Drugs and Eastern religions came like a flood into the Western world. They became the way that people chose to find meaning and values in life. By themselves or together, drugs and Eastern religion became the way that people searched inside themselves for ultimate truth.

Along with drugs and Eastern religions there has been a remarkable increase “of the occult appearing as an upper-story hope.” As modern man searches for answers it “many moderns would rather have demons than be left with the idea that everything in the universe is only one big machine.” For many people having the “occult in the upper story of nonreason in the hope of having meaning” is better than leaving the upper story of nonreason empty. For them horror or the macabre are more acceptable than the idea that they are just a machine.

Existential methodology is marked by the division between reason and nonreason. The dichotomy between reason and nonreason is for Schaeffer “the hallmark of the modern stream of humanistic thinking.” If reason can be totally separated from nonreason then what is put into nonreason is unimportant because reason does not provide a basis “for a choice between one thing and another. Onto this stage comes a new player in the theater of existentialism: theological existentialism.

We saw that during the Renaissance there was an attempt to bring about a “synthesis between Greek Philosophy and Christianity. One of the reasons for the Reformation was the attempt to remove “wrong thinking” from the church. However the humanism which developed in the Renaissance was not erased and it continued to grow into the Age of Enlightenment. The humanistic teachings of the Enlightenment found a home in the faculties of the universities in the west and especially so in Germany. It was in Germany that “theological rationalism became an identifiable entity in the eighteenth century. Then gradually this came to full flood through the German theological faculties during the nineteenth century.” Humanism entered the church and spread across “to all the branches of the church, including the Roman Catholic.” It was in this liberal theology that “the concept of man beginning from himself now began to be expressed in theology and in theological language.” Schaeffer summarizes this by saying that; “As the Renaissance had tried to synthesize Aristotle and Christianity and then Plato and Christianity, these men were attempting to synthesize the rationalism of the Enlightenment and Christianity.” This attempt has often been called religious liberalism.

Nineteenth century theological liberalism of the nineteenth century rejected the aspects of the supernatural in the Bible. Yet they wanted to hold to what is now known as the “historical Jesus.” They did this by trying to remove the supernatural elements of the

New Testament. This reached a climax with the publishing of Albert Schweitzer's (1875-1965) book *The Quest for the Historical Jesus* (1906). "The Quest for the Historical Jesus (especially the conclusion of the second edition which was never translated into English) showed the impossibility of ridding the New Testament of the supernatural and yet keeping any historical Jesus." To admit that there was a historical Jesus forced one to admit to some or all the supernatural events described in the New Testament and to remove these events left one with no historical Jesus at all.

Like secular Humanism before it the intellectual failure of a rationalist theology opened the way for the theological existentialism of a one like Karl Barth (1886-1968). Beginning with his "first commentary (1919) on the New Testament book entitled *The Epistle to the Romans*," Barth brought the existential methodology into theology. He held the same liberal "higher critical" views that the Bible contained many errors that the nineteenth-century liberal theologians held. Yet Barth taught that "a religious 'word' breaks through from it." Barth was applying what we called the existential methodology to theology. This allowed for theology to now be added to "the area of nonreason." This in turn led what has been called neo-orthodox existential theology. In the neo-orthodox existential theological view while the Bible may be filled with errors, it is capable of providing a "religious experience" through nonreason. For the neo-orthodox theologian the Bible was not a source of truth that could be a stated proposition, especially about the cosmos and history, open to any verification. And for many the Bible did not give moral absolutes either. For these theologians, it is not faith in something; it is faith in faith."

This thinking brought many theologians "to the place where the word God had no certain content; but one can use the word God and other religious words as the basis for a content less religious experience within which reason has no place." The new liberal theology has no basis for applying the Bible in a historical situation, "in either morals or law. Everything religious is nonreason, and since reason has no place there, there is no room for discussion; there are only arbitrary pronouncements." Arbitrary pronouncements are not absolutes.

Liberal theology was also left with no to answer the critical question of why does evil exist. Like the Hindu philosophers before them, they can only say that "everything that is is equally in God." Schaeffer concludes that: "Modern humanistic man in both his secular and his religious forms has come to the same awful place. Both have no final way to say what is right and what is wrong, and no final way to say why one should choose noncruelty instead of cruelty."

For modern man and modern theology, by starting from man alone, we are left where the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), found himself -- that God is dead. "If God is dead, then everything for which God gives an answer and meaning is dead. And this is true whether it is a secular man or a modern theologian who says, "God is dead. This is the dilemma of modern man. If one has no personal God then all is dead. Yet man, by his nature, continues to seek an infinite-personal God, "who has not been silent but has spoken, and in the existence of a personal life continuing into

eternity. Without the infinite-personal God, all a person can do, as Nietzsche points out, is to make 'systems.'" These systems or "game-plans" as Schaeffer calls them is nothing more than empty words. We are left with empty religious words that are useful only for the manipulation of society. Building only on us this is where we are, this is the fate of man, left with empty dreams, filled with empty words, in a closed world, just another cog in the "machine. Is it any wonder that we despair?